

YOU KNOW YOU ARE A FOSTER PARENT WHEN ...
From the Foster Parent and Caregiver Conference 2005

REGION 1 (Eastern Washington – Spokane, Wenatchee, Moses Lake, Colville)

- ... When Grandma calls and asks how many will be coming for Christmas
- ... When last week your car was fine – this week you need a van
- ... When people think you are running a child care center
- ... When your new teen-age foster daughter claws your throat and you still give her a hug
- ... There's feces on the wall and it's just part of the decoration
- ... When your four-year old is certain where babies come from – CPS
- ... When the only time you get to pray is when you're in your car on your way to work
- ... The free sample lady at COSTCO goes on break when she sees your family coming
- ... You find yourself saying about your eight-year-old foster child "what's another 10 years?"
- ... They were supposed to be with you six months and it's been 1 ½ years
- ... You have more beds than you have heads
- ... You have more tackle boxes in your bedroom closet than he has in the garage – yours are full of medicine and locked
- ... When you consider going to COSTCO a date night
- ... When your granddaughter hands down to you her book on potty training
- ... When you ask your 10-year-old who their social worker is
- ... When you need a 3,000 mile oil change more often than once a month
- ... You know which drive through has the best \$1 menu and what store or gas station has pop for 25 cents
- ... You have to put 3-minute timer on your bathroom lights, showers and toilets

REGION 2 (North Central Washington – Yakima, Tri-cities, Ellensburg)

- ... When Aretha Franklin is your favorite singer and your favorite song is R-E-S-P-E-C-T
- ... All your beds and pillows squeak with mandatory plastic protectors
- ... You're the only family in the neighborhood that has fire drills, emergency evacuation plans and a "safe" spot to meet in your front yard
- ... When your kids attend a high school with only 30 students and you realize 25 percent of the high school lives at your house
- ... Your children are taught that they "wade" in lakes and streams in the hot summer to not violate state laws related to foster children and swimming
- ... When the placement coordinator has your cell number tattooed on her arm
- ... You know what ISSP, IEP, DCFS, CPS, DLR, OFCL and RFTI mean
- ... When you are wearing a blue and yellow sock and don't have time to care
- ... When you know how to spell encopresis and enuresis
- ... When you know hundreds of strategies on getting kids to bed and getting them up on time
- ... When you need a "pass" to use the bathroom
- ... When your neighbors think you are jackrabbits
- ... When you have to hire two babysitters
- ... When you have to call the plumber once a week
- ... When you have no more social life
- ... When it's hard to breathe when it's time for the kids to go home
- ... You have to take two cars for a trip
- ... You have to eat in shifts
- ... When your oldest joins AARP and your youngest is not yet potty trained
- ... It takes more than \$50 to go to Burger King
- ... When a child tells you 'You are not allowed to touch me'
- ... When people at COSTCO call you by your first name
- ... Actually liking social workers, policemen and therapists

... When it takes three days to pack for a two-day trip
... You understand the job but have no idea what tools to use
... When your kids outgrow their clothes before you can do the laundry

REGION 3 (Northwest Washington – all counties north of King)

... You have more sizes of clothes in your house than the Goodwill
... You don't even look twice at screaming children in the grocery store
... When the school nurse asks you the best way to get rid of head lice
... You know what your five-year-old had for breakfast by the color of the poop mural on the wall
... The principal of your local elementary school asks you if you have ever thought of home schooling
... When you have to buy a larger mailbox for all your Medical coupons
... When not just at Christmas but when every day looks like a toy store exploded
... When a child says "Mom" and you turn around and it isn't yours
... Your neighbor brings over a dozen cookies and apologizes for not having enough for the whole family
... When your pediatrician asks your advice when her child acts out
... You know your licenser's birthday
... You consider going to the bathroom respite if no one knocks on the door or yells, "Mom!"
... When you have been vomited on in every color of the rainbow
... You have memorized every recipe for getting gum out of hair
... When you take everyone out to eat, staff there wants to know what school you are with
... When company comes over and they are the only ones with worried looks on their face when there is a loud bang/crash
... When COSTCO says you qualify for free home delivery
... Your idea of free time is putting the kids in "time out"
... You know how to beat the traffic to Children's Hospital any time of the day or night
... You think of CPR/1st Aid training as a mini-vacation
... A father's car and motorcycles don't thrill you like a large capacity washer does
... When someone asks you how old the kids are in your grocery cart and you tell them 2, 2, and 2 and they ask if they are triplets and you say "no" and they walk away confused
... When you are old and gray but still young at heart, running around with little ones calling you "Mom"
... The principal has your number on speed dial
... Your house has more diversity than the U.N.
... When your laundry looks like a small consignment store
... When a 15-passenger van is too small
... When you have your caseworker's number, or several of them, on speed dial
... You think peanut butter is one of the four basic food groups
... The placement desk knows more about your personal life than your mother
... When you go to Wal-Mart and they know you on a first-name basis and give you three carts
... When you step on a Lego with bare feet and it doesn't hurt any more
... When the last day of school is when you start taking your anxiety medication
... When you consider going to the bathroom a vacation if no one knocks on the door
... When you have five kids and only had to go through the pain of one child birth

REGION 4 (King County)

... When your biological kids say "Mom, you are supposed to be in your golden years"
... You can't give anybody a ride in your car because all the seats have a car seat in them
... One of your former foster children gets dropped off at your home and you don't know where he came from

- ... Your babysitter makes more money per hour than you do.
- ... You enjoy watching a stranger's eyes when you tell them the ages of your children – 2 months, 20 months, 25 months and 4 years
- ... The mailman reports you for welfare fraud because he thinks there is a check with each medical coupon (true story)
- ... At 66, you are the oldest person in the PTA
- ... When all you have in your bathroom cupboard is diapers size birth to adult
- ... You have stock in the toilet paper company
- ... It takes you 10 trips into the house before you can leave the driveway
- ... Before you go to bed, you must make sure your youngest gets his bottle but the oldest doesn't get his
- ... When you have 3 "Stephanies" in your home
- ... The police operators recognize your voice because you have called in so many runaway reports
- ... Your sales person thinks he has gotten one over on you after you buy the extended warranty on your washer and dryer
- ... When a 7, uh, 9, uh 12, person van and then a bus is too small

REGION 5 (Kitsap and Pierce Counties)

- ... When you explain to the principal that, yes, your son's parents are drug addicts ... but it is not you
- ... Your night out is when you attend a foster parent association meeting.
- ... When you go to the mall, people take a second look
- ... When your diaper count is higher than savings account
- ... When your oldest starts college and your youngest starts day care
- ... The bags under your eyes are bigger than the bags of your groceries
- ... Your emergency contact is your social worker
- ... When your only vacation is a free trip to the (foster parent) conference
- ... When you find yourself watching "Super Nanny" and wondering if you can count it for training hours
- ... When you are old and "the change" means baby's diapers
- ... When your six kids have six different fathers – and six different mothers
- ... When you never leave home with a clean shirt
- ... When you buy 50 packages of toilet paper at the same time to get through the summer months
- ... Your sales receipt is up to 12 feet long when you go to the grocery store each time

REGION 6 (Western Washington - Olympic Peninsula, southwest Washington to Vancouver)

- ... Various substances smeared on the wall start to resemble an expensive designer wall treatment
- ... You have to call RotoRooter to clean out your vent ducts
- ... You hear of someone with boundary issues and you don't refer them to a land surveyor
- ... You can't open a door or window without an alarm sounding
- ... Against your better judgment, you find yourself voting for tax increases
- ... You have six last names on your mail box
- ... Your foster kids come back to thank you!
- ... The first thing you read in the newspaper in the "police blotter"
- ... You argue with your foster kids' teacher
- ... Instead of giving clothes to the Goodwill when no one in your house will fit them, you put them in the attic. Two weeks later, you take them out.
- ... You spend more time in school than when you were in school
- ... You don't have to wonder whether your COSTCO membership will pay for itself
- ... You know all your city police officers on a first name basis
- ... When someone asks you "how many children do you have" you have to count and

give a tentative answer

... You build an extra room to your house for a sewing room and the first day it is ready to move into you are moving two kids into it instead of your sewing machine and add a second sewing room and move two more kids in